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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 8227  
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 4753  
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 2946  
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/24/2013  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [EG](#) [ER](#)  
SUBJECT: EGYPT: HEADING OFF FUTURE FORCIBLE RETURNS OF  
ASYLUM SEEKERS

REF: A. CAIRO 1316  
[1](#)B. CAIRO 1322

Classified By: PRM AFR Margaret McKelvey for reason 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Dept greatly appreciate's Embassy Cairo's efforts on behalf of Eritrean asylum seekers in Egypt and welcomes the proposed talking points. Slight modifications are suggested below from NEA and PRM.

[1](#)2. (C) Proposed talking points:

-- We recognize that Egypt is both a destination and transit country for asylum seekers and economic migrants, and we recognize Egypt's right and obligation to its citizens to properly control its borders.

-- We share your concern about the continued flow of mostly African asylum seekers and economic migrants transiting Egypt in illegal attempts to reach Israel. We recognize that Egypt faces legitimate security concerns over the smuggling of people, and potentially of weapons and narcotics.

-- We commend Egypt for historically maintaining a generous asylum policy, even while facing large flows of asylum seekers. Egypt has been particularly generous to the hundreds of thousands of Sudanese asylum seekers and economic migrants in the country.

-- However, we are concerned by credible reports that your government has recently returned some one thousand Eritrean asylum seekers to Eritrea, before they could be properly interviewed and processed by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

-- From the humanitarian perspective, the UNHCR has called for countries to refrain from all returns of rejected asylum seekers to Eritrea and instead grant them some complementary form of protection, due to well-founded fears of persecution - including torture - upon their return.

-- From a practical standpoint, it is not clear that returning these Eritreans will deter others from illegally entering Egypt and/or illegally transiting Egypt onwards to Israel. We note that dozens of Africans attempting to illegally cross from the Sinai to Israel have been killed by Egyptian security forces over the past year, and that these incidents have not deterred others from making the attempt.

-- Finally, we note that large-scale forced repatriation of

Eritreans is a human rights concern that has attracted significant public attention from will likely also attract the interest of members of the U.S. Congress.

-- We ask that you work with the UNHCR and your international partners on this issue rather than unilaterally deporting Eritrean asylum seekers. (Note. If the GOE criticizes UNHCR for not doing its job, as they have recently in other meetings, Embassy may wish to point out that from late February until mid-June, the GOE restricted UNHCR from having access to the Eritreans in question. Thus, under these circumstances, criticism of UNHCR performance may be considered unduly harsh.)

-- The U.S. has resettled some 1,500 Eritrean refugees from the Near East and Horn of Africa since 2005 and expects to resettle even larger numbers in the coming year.

-- The U.S. is prepared to consider any resettlement case referred to us by the UNHCR in Egypt. We have resettled over 10,000 Sudanese refugees referred by the UNHCR in Egypt, primarily between 1998 and 2006, and maintain significant processing capacity in Cairo.

-- We intend to discuss this issue further with UNHCR and other international partners at a multilateral meeting on refugee resettlement in Geneva the week of June 30.

RICE